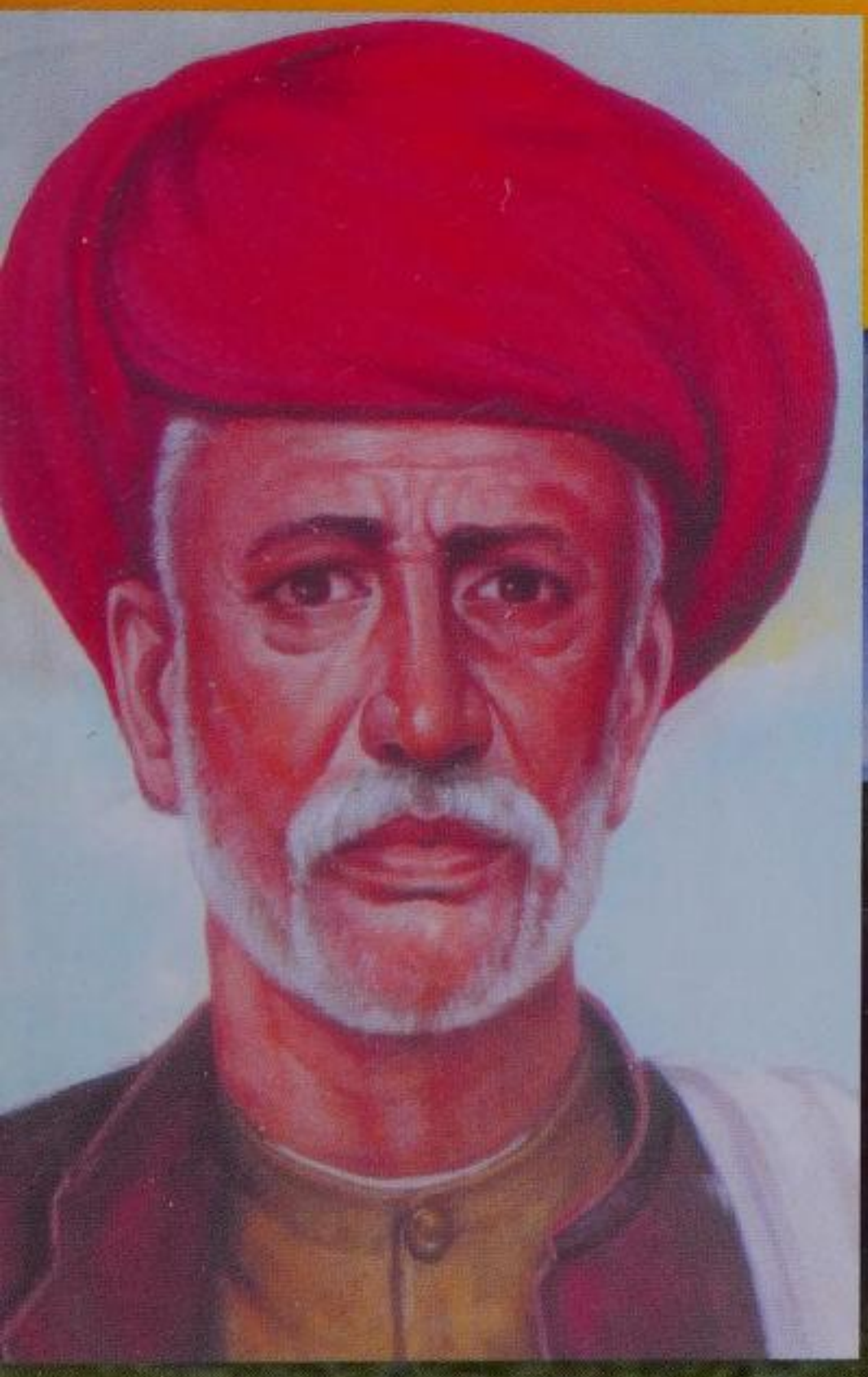
Mahatma Phule Studies Series

PHULE
In His Own Words



Sunil Sardar
and
Thom Wolf

Second Edition

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PHULE in His Own Words

In New Delhi, three statues in Parliament command your attention: *Gandhi*, *Ambedkar*, and *Phule*.

- *Gandhi* is the Father of Modern India—the George Washington of India.
- *Ambedkar* is the Father of the Constitution of India—the James Madison of India.
- *Phule* is the Father of Social Revolution of India—the Abraham Lincoln of India.

Around the world, everyone knows of Gandhi. A few (a very few) know about Ambedkar. But no one knows of Phule.

So why is it that unknown Phule is the other statute in Parliament? And more significant for India today, why did both Gandhi and Ambedkar say Phule was *their* guru?

Who is Mahatma Phule—that 19th century contemporary of Karl Marx and Abraham Lincoln?

What made Phule the exemplar of compassionate social revolution—India's voice for equality, the defender of the poor, and yet the advocate of such radical change from the Brahmanical Hindu-Manu system?

And why are the worldview, the mindset and the actions of Phule so relevant for the 21st century of India—and the global world?

Sardar and Wolf give an East/West answer in this brief introduction to Phule, *Phule in His Own Words*.

Mahatma Phule Studies Series

PHULE In His Own Words

Sunil Sardar and Thom Wolf

University Institute

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PHULE In His Own Words
SECOND EDITION

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PREFACE

"Some time in the future"—those are the words of Mahatma Jotirao Phule, father of social revolution in India. With those words Phule anticipated some time yet to come. Phule said that when that "time in the future" came, India would become a new India. We think Phule's time has come.

For me, Sunil, I have grappled with the thoughts and vision of Phule for years—thrilling at Phule's incredible range of perspective and his brilliant boldness for India's flourishing. I, Thom, was introduced to Phule by Sunil. And I can rather comfortably say that, for us foreigners, most of us have never *heard* of Phule, much less considered his voice in today's global conversation—the discussion about, "What is the best way to lives on this planet?"

Now, in these last several years, we both have talked Phule, discussed Phule, argued Phule, and advocated Phule. We have travelled together across and up and down India to engage top India and bottom India. We have talked with

leaders in five-star hotels and over village fires. We have sat with a circle of a few friends and together we have addressed crowds to the tens of thousands.

From Kolkata to Colachel, from Mumbai to Lucknow, from New Delhi to Chennai, from Chatisgarh to Chhastipur—the response to Phule's message and life is the same: amazement, questions, probing, and a repeated affirmation of rightness and providential timing. A Phule conversation always creates an aggravating of boldness, an energizing of hope. And to speak quite honestly, many times we have sensed of a Presence, a spiritual moment.

Actually, this book has come from those persons, those of everyday India and leadership India. From friends, family, colleagues, and even new acquaintances who were almost strangers, who have urged us, pressed us, to write about our findings. And not just those from India places. As we have travelled throughout India and internationally, and entertained foreign friends, we have felt compelled to make these thoughts of Phule more accessible to larger circles.

Basically, it has been rather the same almost everywhere we have shared. Indians have heard of Mahatma Phule, but westerners do not know Phule. Westerners, frankly, have not heard of Phule at all—as in, *not at all.* So why should we take the trouble to introduce Phule *in his own words*?

Because people around the world know of Abraham Lincoln, of Nelson Mandela, of Mother Teresa. And people *should know* about Phule—about Phule and his vision of

Preface

India: a different India, India listening to a different voice. And also, because sometimes a voice from the past, just because it has not been heard or remembered, becomes a fresh voice. A distant voice, yes. But a distinct voice that is beyond the din, the difficulties and the destruction that too much surround us. And then, sometimes in history it seems a voice has been hidden, forgotten, but maybe also kept until a more ready moment. And then, by that very distance, by the very experience of rediscovery, that voice gives us perspective.

And so it is with the voice of Phule. His voice was already there, but we were not ready. It seems so strange that we did not or could not hear Phule before. Where were we? What were we thinking? Why didn't we see this before?

In one way, Phule needs no introduction to Indians, for Mahatma Jotirao Phule is the Father of Social Revolution of India. He is one of those models we all should imitate. He is a standard by which we may judge our marks. He is the kind of person our mother told us to be, the kind of person, in our hearts, we wish we were, or can become: truthful, kind, courageous. Joti is the person you wish was your friend, the kind of person you don't mind being second (or third, or fourth) around. Because you just want to be around him.

Once he says it, you can say it. Once he sees it, all can see it. Once he marks it, you never forget it. And Phule had a prayer for India. It was for "some time in the future". We

believe that time has come.

So take note. This is not a neutral book. But over period of time, we have become persuaded that this is a necessary book. Phule was not a neutral person. But he was a person who had become convinced of certain things—things about life, things about himself and others, things about India—and most deeply, things about truth.

Today, Phule is a necessary person. Necessary because India today, more than ever, needs to hear this voice of her native son, the son of the soil of Mother India.

If you put Phule into perspective historically, cross-culturally, and globally, we think he can perhaps be best compared to President Abraham Lincoln of America—the President Americans consider their greatest moral leader in justice for the enslaved, compassion for the poor, and spokesman for truth. As President during the American Civil War, Lincoln declared and delivered the emancipation of the black African slaves.

Phule was the Abraham Lincoln of India: he was the first person of the Hindu caste-community to take off the hinges from the doors of the 3,000-years-old house that Manu built.

Manu recorded the rules of Hinduism. He described the bricks of the house of Hinduism. That house, the house of Manu, is the cultural house of India, the social structure that Phule called the "prison house" of India.

Preface

Joti and *Jyoti* he was called. *Jyoti* means flame. *Joti* means yoke. *Phule* means flower. And that is what Phule became for India—a raging flame, the smasher of the yoke, and an exquisite fragrance. A man who was feared in the 19th century, but forgotten in the 20th century, Phule looked to "some time in the future" when his words would be filled full.

Here, then, is flaming Phule. Here is fragrant Phule. Here is Phule in his own words—an exhilarating encouragement today for India shining, a fearsome fire today against India stinking. Here is Phule for 21st century India—village and urban India, common and creamy layer India. Here is Phule for India searching.

Chapter 1 is about that fateful night, the night when darkness overreached its twisted prison walls. The first chapter opens a window into the heart of Phule—Phule the low-caste Shudra boy who was crushed, stunned, and confused. It tells the story of that fateful night of anguish and anger, of sobbing and groans, of tears and rage.

It is about the fateful night that changed a village boy into a visionary man, the night that birthed, through loud cries and tears, the one who would become the Father of Indian Social Revolution.

It was Phule the boy who rose up from his humiliation to become a voice for the voiceless, a comfort to the 'caste-out', an equalizer and a fist for the fallen. So Phule rose up from that single fateful night with a heart-vow that changed

his life, and the life of India.

Chapter 2 gathers us around the flames that stoked a bonfire in the heart, mind, and soul of Phule. This chapter gathers for you the inner history, the fueling themes, of Phule. For Phule's five convictions were like wood to a fire that was never snuffed out.

Chapter 3 gives the outer history of India. Nehru wrote the history of India for his daughter Indira. Chaudhuri has left us his summary of India's story. In this chapter you have the four ages of India that framed Phule's thinking.

Chapter 4 shows the future of India through Phule's eyes. There was a yearning that never left Phule, a cry to the Creator that gave him hope. Here we peer into the soul of Mahatma Phule: we see his vision for his country, we are introduced to his mentor Baliraja, and we learn of Phule's tears for the common people of India.

Chapter 5 listens in on an interview of Phule. Here is surprising Phule. If you are not familiar with Phule's research and integration of India's legends and history, and his acquaintance of village India's spirituality, this will give you a portal into his thinking. In this interview, Phule opens up the tale of Baliraja the ancient king, sensitively listens to the prayers of the women across the centuries in the villages of India, and lays out the two different receptions to King Baliraja. In so doing, Phule also opens up the great gap fixed between Brahminical India and Majority India.

Chapter 6 chalks out the stark contrasts that Phule saw between Manu-India and Baliraja-India. How will India walk if she chooses to continue in the path of Manu? And what would be different if India would chose to listen to a different cultural mentor? Ranging from Phule the intellectual-Mount-Kailash to Phule the bulldog-street-fighter, this is Phule as his best. This is Phule in his own words on Manu and Baliraja.

Chapter 7 concentrates on Phule's call to India. Not just to India shining, nor only to India stinking, but especially and deeply, to India searching. Truth is the key to understanding Phule. And Phule saw keenly that a fellowship of TruthSeekers—in his own day, and in this, our day—would be key to transforming India.

Phule knew searingly that Truth sets you free only in the midst of sacrifice. Perhaps that is why he was so compellingly drawn to Baliraja, the sacrificed One, who had already set so many other peoples and cultures on the road to truth, compassion, and justice. India remembers Mahatma Phule as the one who was willing to toil and sacrifice for an India transformed, an India freed from her shackles, an India who could change from the inside out, if she awakened and listened to a different voice.

Before you read further, we want to thank our friends and our families, all those who have urged us on and encouraged us repeatedly. And, as Phule would say, we are grateful to the Creator of us all—who has created us all equal as

brothers and sisters—for His goodness to us. Lastly, we offer this small book as a token of our love and hope for India seeking, 21st century India, that she may experience that transformation Phule prayed for "some time in the future".

10 March 2007

Sunil Sardar and Thom Wolf
New Delhi, India

SECOND EDITION

Monsoon came today to New Delhi: cooling, refreshing, nurturing—a downpour. There is nothing to compare to the monsoon rains on a dry and scorched commuinty. Delhi is a happier, more free, more Delhi-as-she-is-intended-to-be because of the rainfall.

Old friends and new acquaintances around the world tell us that *Phule in His Own Words* has been monsoon for their thinking, their spirit, their courage.

We are deeply touched from those conversations, and very grateful for the comments, conversations, and corrections for the first edition. May this second edition be a truth monsoon for India searching.

9 July 2008

Sunil Sardar and Thom Wolf
New Delhi, India

THE WORLD'S WORST SLAVERY

That Fateful Night

1

The World's Worst Slavery

That Fateful Night

SCHOOLING over, Joti, a gardener's son, was marked for the trade of florist—just as a carpenter's son was expected in those days to be a carpenter. But Joti was not a path-follower. He was a path-finder.

While the thoughts of service and welfare of the people were revolving in his mind, an incident took place that gave a turn to his life.

His Friend's Marriage Procession Joti was invited to attend the marriage ceremony of a Brahmin friend. Since he loved his Brahmin friends sincerely, he attended the ceremony.

The bridegroom was going in a procession to the house of the bride. The procession consisted of Brahmins—men and women and children. There was hardly any person from other [non-Brahmin caste] communities. Joti was walking along with the processionists.

An orthodox Brahmin recognized him and was infuriated. He was outraged that a Mali—a low caste boy—had polluted their celebration by walking along with the terrestrial gods, the Brahmins. He bawled out:

> "How dare you walk along with Brahmins! You Shudra!
>
> You have violated all caste rules! You have inflicted an insult on us!
>
> You are not our equal!
>
> You should have thought a hundred times before behaving like this.
>
> Get behind! Otherwise, go away!
>
> People have nowadays lost all shame. They violate caste rules!
>
> They are growing arrogant under this British raj!"

Joti's Life-Changing Perplexity Joti was perplexed. He was dazed. In a moment he came to himself. He was now perturbed.

He felt the insult deeply. He felt its pricking in every muscle of his body, in every cell in his brain, in every drop of his blood. He abandoned the procession and returned home.

With the burden of these thoughts on his mind, Joti entered his house. He narrated the whole incident to his father with anguish and anger in his eyes. He sobbed. He groaned. He raged.

His Father's Pacification His father, who was a respecter of traditions and customs, said that because they belonged to the Shudra caste they could not be the equal of Brahmins. The Brahmins were standing on the top of the ladder of the caste system. And the Brahmins were the central figure in the religion and social life of the Hindus.

His father explained that it was very kind of the Brahmins to drive him away instead of punishing him outright. He said that he had seen non-Brahmins humiliated and trampled under an elephant's feet.

In the sphere of justice, there was one law for the Brahmins and another for non-Brahmins. The old records were full of many ghastly wrongs done repeatedly by the Brahmins. Phule's father, Govindrao, observed that those non-Brahmin castes who considered themselves equals to the Brahmins in society, were even prevented from wearing certain types of garments.

The poor Untouchables [Dalits] were the worst sufferers in Brahmin-ruled India.

Every Untouchable was required to walk through the streets of Pune with a branch of leaves tied to his waist and a pot hanging from his neck. If the Untouchable wanted to spit, he had to use only the pot hanging around his neck, so he would not pollute the ground on which the Brahmins stood.

But he could not enjoy even this liberty of walking in the streets in the early morning or late evening, lest his shadow defile the Brahmins, Govindrao concluded.

That Fateful Night Joti listened to his father who advised him to preserve the old customs and not to incur the wrath of the Brahmins. It was no use doing a thing that was outside the pale of caste customs and Brahmanic traditions.

But Joti had not derived in vain his faith from the lives of Shivaji, Washington and Luther. He recalled his father's fresh warning that had Joti done such a thing during the time of his father's childhood, he would have met the fate of a rebel—he would have been killed.

That night Joti did not have sound sleep.

He sat far into the night brooding over the revolutionary thought of the equality of human beings.

The Inward History of Joti Having analysed the causes, he soon realized the genesis of brahmanical ascendancy and domination in every sphere of life. He felt the full force of the mental slavery and poverty that the Shudras had been suffering for centuries.

- They were caste-born in poverty and they caste-died in poverty and slavery.
- They suffered their caste-ordained slavery resignedly, believing it to be the inevitable heritage of a Shudra caste birth.
- The life of a Shudra meant loss of dignity and loss of respectable means of livelihood.

A deep-seated craving decided his attitude against to the prevailing milieu. He abandoned the path of blood-and-

iron that he had previously decided on for the salvation of his country.

A force gathered in Joti's stout heart.

It strove towards its objectives. All his actions, thoughts, emotions, dreams and desires were directed to it. A style of life developed.

The goal makes the man. All great changes are preceded by a vigorous intellectual revaluation and reorganization. This was the inward history of Joti.[1]

PHULE'S FIRE

Five Flames

2

Phule's Fire

Five Flames

Writing styles a hundred years ago were different from today. But you can still feel the fire in Phule.

Phule was both a brilliant thinker and a trenchant organizer. His thinking ran on five tracks—five themes that fired his heart and mobilized him. Here is Phule in his own words.

1. *Freedom "Some kind-hearted Englishmen and Americans (saintly characters these) were deeply aggrieved at the sad plight of our countrymen ....They placed many different novel ideas before me.*

When, after deep reflection, I came to understand my due rights and principles I kicked open the main door of the vast false prison-house of Brahmin cunning and tyranny and emerged in the sunshine of freedom, and thanked our Creator from the bottom of my heart". [1]

This *spiritual freedom* is the foundation of Phule. This is Phule's sunshine, his sunshine of freedom. But too often, this spiritual foundation is unseen, overlooked, or avoided by those who speak about Phule. And yet it is this very foundational experience that "kicked open the main door of the vast false prison house of Brahmin cunning and tyranny."

For Phule, his spiritual freedom, his worldview transformation, preceded and powered all his social activism. Phule insisted that it was his spiritual transformation which freed him from the deceptions of Brahmanical intellectual cunning and from their caste-sanctioned injustices of social tyranny.

2. *Family* What drove Phule to embrace all people? Answer: he saw them in a fresh way. (1) *"All human beings are the children of God.* (2) *I shall always conduct myself, keeping in mind the common fraternal relations of us all".*[2] (3) Phule was convinced that God is the Creator, the Father of us all. For Phule, that meant no religious intermediary or broker is needed for any person to know God—*"such as a priest, or a religious preceptor or a guru."*

This is radical Phule: caste may forbid social touch, but by the Creator we all share a common spiritual touch. To Phule, no person's shadow is dreaded. Instead, every stranger is a brother. None are caste-out; all may come in. And our greatest need is never some guru pandit from a special caste, but only genuine prayer to our Sovereign Creator.

3. *Food* *"I shall regard them as members of my own family and shall share food with them—without any inhibitions whatsoever".*[3] For Phule, in his generation, this was the back-breaker: to *"regard them as members of my own family"* and to *"share food with them—without any inhibitions whatsoever."*

In taking bread together—and drinking from the same water source and cup together—he took on the brahmanic myth-spinners' system. He rejected any theory that refused to sit at table and take food as equals, as family, and as friends.

Today, Phule sounds totally sensible, even common place. So is there still a need for Phule's voice on shared food—"without any inhibitions whatsoever" in the 21st century? This we know: Phule made high and haughty theories sit at low homely tables.

4. *Fellowship* *[Those persons and their writings who] "propound that (1) all human beings are entitled to enjoy (2) human rights (3) in equal measure…I venerate."* And *"I shall deem myself (4) as the younger brother of…such…of (5) any country or (6) any religion in the world".*[4]

Truth is the universal inclusive for Phule—thus his sense of fellowship with all Truth *seekers*, Truth *speakers*, and Truth *sharers*.

Contrary to many social reformers of his day, Phule drew deep inspiration and insight from Baliraja. This Baliraja,

via contemporary leaders like George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and his Scottish missionary teachers, fired Phule's hungry mind with "novel ideas" of our common Creator, our common conscience, and thus our common human rights.

5. *Fight "I hereby strongly condemn all those main religious books of the Brahmins which declare us to be their vassals...or any other similar religious books propounding a similar obnoxious theory".*[5]

Deshpande of Jawaharlal Nehru University[6] translates Phule as saying: *"I denounce all the main books of the* bhats *which decree us their slaves as well as any other books which claim so."*

Phule knew that corrupt books corrupt the society and that a corrupt outlook produces a corrupt outcome. Marx mistook men for their mindset, and hated them. Phule did not, and loved them. The socially dominant will never change, so kill them as strangers, said Marx. One day they may change, so appeal to them as brothers, argued Phule.

To Phule then, his spiritual freedom, his family behaviour, his social inclusion, and even his worldwide fellowship were not inward facing. Instead, they were all part of the energizing lifeblood that gave him encouragement and courage to enter the fight for others—so that the oppressed, the poor, the cruelly deceived, those pushed backward, and those cast out, might also be set free.

These five flames fed the fire in Phule and made Phule who he was—the Indian father of social reformation in India. Although he was Mahatma to the people, he was hated—or more accurately feared—by many in his own day.

Today, Phule is beginning to be heard again. Our question: *will we listen*? And, *will we act*?

PHULE ON THE
HISTORY OF INDIA
Five Eyes

PHULE ON THE HISTORY OF INDIA

Five Eras

3

Phule on the History of India

Five Eras

Phule had a heart for history. And he had acquired an aversion to myth, a strong allergic aversion. So the spiritual teachings about caste of the *Manushamhita* and the tales of Krishna in the *Bhagavad-gita* were not for considerate reflection, but for clear rejection.

For example, Mahatma Phule has one of his shocked characters remind us that the *Bhagavad-gita* contains "atrocious fictions." In comparison, he says, the tales of *Aesop* are "a thousand times better. At least they do not contain anything which would corrupt the minds of young children."

All in all, Phule considered all the works—all writings about Vedic incantations, the power of magic and killing with black magic, use of rosary beads, the confusion of the Brahma, the reign of Narad, and prohibitions on educating Shudras—as "hollow books." But he took them seriously, utterly seriously. Because those "hollow books" "allowed

their selfish Brahman brothers to continue robbing the Shudras."[1]

Phule regarded the history of India to largely be one of persistent spiritual misdirection, borne out of pundits' religious deceptions. In Phule's opinion, such a worldview drove the purposes of an unwavering political dominance, an oppressive social caste-hierarchy, and for the bahujan/majority masses, a grinding economic poverty.

For public conversation, Phule explained India's history with three or four eras—sometimes using five eras. And he stated openly his reasons for emphasising history over myth: to call out those enslaved "for generations" to create a new period of transformation, equality and human rights, and freedom for India.

In this chapter, while the headings are ours, the thoughts and words are Phule's.[2]

1. Invaders and enslavers: *the Aryans*

"This, in short, is the history of Brahmin domination in India. The original Aryan ancestors of the Brahmins waged a war against the original inhabitants in this land long ago and after defeating them, turned them into their slaves. Anyone who will consider well the whole history of Brahmin domination in India, and the thraldom under which it has retained the people even up to the present day, will agree with us in thinking that no language could be too harsh by which to characterize the selfish heartlessness and the consummate cunning of the Brahmin

tyranny by which India has been so long governed.

How far the Brahmins have succeeded in their endeavours to enslave the minds of the Shudras and Atishudras, those of them who have come to know the true state of matters know well. For generations past they have borne these chains of slavery and bondage. The world-hater brahmanical fraud has spread all over India: a scheme of mystery and magic, thereby deceiving all the Shudra and Atishudras people, who have been excessively cheated by the cunning Aryans for thousands of years.

Innumerable Brahmin writers, with the same objectives as those of Manu and others of his class, added from time to time to the existing mass of legends, the idle fantasies of their own brains, and palmed them off upon the ignorant masses as of divine inspiration, or as the acts of the Deity himself.

The most immoral, inhuman, unjust actions and deeds have been attributed to that Being who is our Creator, Governor and Protector, and who is all Holiness himself. These blasphemous writings, the products of the distempered brains of these interlopers, were received as gospel truths, for to doubt them was considered as the most unpardonable sin."[3]

2. Intoxicated and exploiters: *the Brahmans*

"Later on, intoxicated with their power, they exploited every opportunity to produce crafty and cunning books and built, as it were, a strong fortress of these books in which

they imprisoned all the slaves for generations. There, they have been torturing them in various ways and enjoying themselves at the cost of the slaves.

This system of slavery, to which the Brahmins reduced the lower classes is in no respects inferior to that which obtained a few years ago in America. In the days of rigid Brahmin dominance, so lately as that of the time of the Peshwa, my Shudra brethren had even greater hardships and oppression practised upon them than what even the slaves in America had to suffer.

To this system of selfish superstition and bigotry, we are to attribute the stagnation and all the evils under which India has been groaning for many centuries.

It will, indeed, be difficult to name a single advantage which accrued to the aborigines from the advent of this intensely selfish and tyrannical sect—the Brahmins.

The Indian ryot, [peasant, tenant farmer]—the Shudra and Atishudras—the Indian ryot has been in fact a proverbial milch cow. He has passed from hand to hand.

And those who successively held sway over him cared only to fatten themselves on the sweat of his brow, without caring for his welfare or condition. It was sufficient for their purposes, that they held him safe in their clutches for squeezing out of him as much as they possibly could.

The Brahmin had as last so contrived to entwine himself round the Shudra in every large or little undertaking, in every domestic or public business, that the Shudra is, by custom, quite unable to transact any activity of significance

without the Brahmin's aid.

Under the guise of religion, the Brahmin has is finger in every thing, big or small, which the Shudra undertakes. Go to his house, to his field or to the court: the Brahmin is there, under some specious pretext or other, trying to squeeze out of him as much as hs cunning and wily brain can manage. The Brahmin despoils the Shudra not only in his capacity of a priest, but does so in a variety of other ways.

Having by his superior education and cunning monopolize al the higher places of employment, the ingenuity of his ways is past finding out. In the most insignificant village as in the largest town, the Brahmin is the all in all, the be all and the end all of the ryot. He is the master, the ruler.

Even the educated Brahmin who knows his exact position and how he has come by it, will not condescend to acknowledge the errors of his forefathers and willingly forego the long cherished false notions of his own superiority. At present, no one has the moral courage to do what only duty demands. And as long as this continues, one sect distrusting and degrading another sect, the condition of the Shudras will remain unaltered. And India will never advance in greatness or prosperity."[4]

3. Dispatched, but disloyal: *the Muslims*

"The Lord, the Merciful, precisely because of his mercy and his desire to rescue the Shudras and the Atishudras

from slavery, sent the monotheistic Muslims—who do no believe in the caste-system—to this land.

Thus it was that greedy conquistadors from the French, the Portuguese and the Muslim rulers invaded this country and took away inordinate amounts of wealth from the Brahmins. Many of them defaced the selfish religion of the Brahmans. And finally, several Muslim warriors carried thousands of Brahmans by their ears, converted them to their own human religion, and performed circumcisions. But right up to this time, the prohibition on teaching the Shudra farmers' children in the Brahmin Sanskrit schools continues.

When the unselfish followers of Hazrat Muhammad Paigambar stepped into this country, on the strength of their holy monotheist religion, they began to decimate the selfish religion of the Aryas and bhats. So some Shudras very enthusiastically started embracing the Mohammedan religion.

But then, the Muslims also betrayed God. They spent their time in banquets, luxurious living and musical concerts. They were busy enjoying the luxuries as if they had almost gained paradise right here on earth.

The Creator got annoyed with the Muslims. He deprived them of their power and glory."[5]

4. Established, aggrieved, and ignorant: *the British*

"And then…He—the Creator—did not keep quiet. He civilized the English primitives,[6] granted them qualities

like extraordinary valour. Now He has sent them to our land to rescue the Shudras and the Atishudras from the slavery of the Arya bhats.

When the valiant British established their rule in this land, the kindhearted Europeans and Americans were deeply aggrieved by our misery. Several American and Scottish followers of Baliraja in the West came to this country without the least regard for what their governments would say. They preached the true teachings of Jesus among the Shudras and freed them from the deceit and slavery of the Brahmins.

By now, most of the Brahmins have realised that these missionaries will certainly not allow them to dominate the Shudras. Therefore, the wily Brahmins intend to drive the British government and the missionaries away from this country—before the friendship between the faithful followers of the Baliraja and the ignorant Shudras matures further.

So now, they are using their hereditary deceit once again and have started to incite the Shudras against the British. The rest of them have acquired various jobs as clerks etc. in government. And they have infested the places so thickly that it is impossible to find any office, either government or otherwise, without a Brahmin in it.

But those followers of Baliraja from the West pulled the rope of slavery from around Shudras' and Atishudras' necks—tied there by the Brahmins—and threw it in the oppressors' face.

And some English gentlemen among them, following the teaching of a sage of their religion are in all sincerity making every effort to rescue the Shudras and Atishudras from their unnaturally slavery. And who does this sage happened to be? Their great sage is called Yashwant[7] and his great teaching is: 'You must love your enemy and do him a good turn'."[8]

5. Informed and transformed: *the Jotibas*

"You know, I have written a play—*Tritya Ratna/The Third Jewel*—about how the bhat joshis deceive the Shudras with the rigmarole of their self-serving religion, and how the Christian missionaries disseminate true knowledge of their impartial religion among them to lead them onto the path of Truth.

And I had submitted this play to the Dakshina Prize Committee. This was way back in 1855. But even there, the opinions of the Brahmin members held sway, so my play was straight away rejected.

I wrote another book called *The Cunning Craft of the Brahmans*, and published it at my own cost. One of my friends in Pune suggested I send letters to some high ranking officers in the Education Department. I sent those letters accordingly, but not one of them dared to blacken his name by buying a single copy for fear of offending the Brahmins.

But I learned a valuable lesson. I never cringed before those people and learned to rely on the great God, our Father, who created us. I am very grateful to Him for that.

So, as I have said, those American and Scottish followers of Baliraja in the West, came to this country without the least regard for what their governments would say. They preached the true teachings of Jesus among the Shudras and freed them from the deceit and slavery of the Brahmins.

They entered our prisons and asked us, 'Folks, you are human beings just like us. Our Creator and Sustainer are one and the same. You are entitled to have all the rights that we have. Then why do you obey the dictates of these crafty bhats?'

All these sacred ideas awakened me to my real rights. Then I kicked the crafty Brahman prison gates open and fervently thanked the Creator for this deliverance.

I regard all those Shudras who follow the path of righteousness, who believe only in God, their Creator, and who have vowed to behave in a clean and straight manner, as my brothers. I will treat them as members of my family and will eat food with them without any inhibitions whatsoever.

I appeal to my illiterate, suffering Shudra brethren: if any one of them desires to free himself from the slavery of the bhats, I will be extremely grateful."[9]

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For Phule, these five periods described the history to his times. It is quite striking that this father of social transformation in India had such a powerful grasp of

history. In this, he was akin to the father of the American nation: George Washington.

Mahatma Phule and President Washington were intellectual and spiritual soul-brothers when it came to their view of history. They lived out their lives around five historical convictions:

1. The Creator is the maker of all humans, endowing every woman and man with equal dignity and honour.
2. This benevolent Creator, the all-powerful and all-merciful God, guides and intervenes in the events of humanity's history.
3. Providence, the working of God in history, is not impersonal fate. Moreover, it was not the view of Washington or Phule that Providence is always on their side. The Almighty is on the side of truth, regardless of the immediate circumstances or appearances of history or the oppositions of men. And truth will always and ultimately bring all things to a good end.
4. Phule often describes Providence as benevolent and God as merciful. Washington's favourite description of Providence is "inscrutable."
5. In their own lifetimes, Mahatma Phule and President Washington were recognized as history-making persons. Therefore, it is even more impressive that, in the face of Providence, both

> Phule and Washington, display such a life-long sense of awe, gratefulness, and confidence in the workings of their Creator. Perhaps Washington's very last words as he died, "Tis well," reflect the root belief of his life—a confidence Phule also seemed to share.[10]

Karl Marx wrote of colonial imperialism and economic necessity. Jotirao Phule experienced the British bruisings and blunders firsthand. But Phule saw more: he perceived that even the British times of oppression in India were still providentially guided. And for the masses dominated for thousands of years by Brahmin deceptions, Phule concluded that even those British rulers were under the providential hand of the Creator.

Karl Marx in 1853 wrote: "England has to fulfill a double mission in India: one destructive, the other regenerating—the annihilation of old Asiatic society, and lay the material foundations of Western society in India."[11]

As far as Marx goes, Phule would have agreed. But Phule saw more than Marx. If you add the concept of "spiritual" to the thinking of Marx, Phule would have agreed with Karl Marx's estimation of the historical role of the British Empire in South Asia.

Phule, going beyond Marx, would say: "England has to fulfill a double mission in India: one destructive, the other regenerating—the annihilation of old Asiatic society, and lay the spiritual and material foundations of Western society

in India."

For Phule, it was true that the benevolent hand of Providence was destroying the old brahmanical society. But for Phule, the Creator was also, laying the spiritual and material foundations for Baliraja in India.

What would Phule see in India's moment today in the global world?

PHULE'S PRAYER

Some Time in the Future

4

Phule's Prayer

Some Time in the Future

India is what Phule lived for.
"Some time in the future":
that is what Phule waited for.
"Some time in the future":
that is what Phule dreamed of.
"Some time in the future":
that is what Phule prayed for.

Phule knew that until that time came, India would remain the same. No matter the surface changes, the politicians' promises, or the outward paint, India would remain the same—until "some time in the future" when five things happen across India.

We are now some 150 years later. But this could be the generation. Right now, this could be that "time in the future" that Phule spoke of 150 years ago. This could be the time, India's time, the time of Phule's five fresh things.

According to Mahatma Phule, five fresh things would characterize the time in India's future that he dreamed of, waited for, and prayed for.

1. *Shudra leaders will come to their senses*

Phule prayed for the time when Shudra leaders "will come to their senses" and stand up for their equal rights given by the One God, our Creator.

2. *Shudra children will be educated as equals*

Phule said Shudras would "educate their own children" as equals to all other castes in India and all other people in the world. Specifically, for their children's freedom, they would see that their own children, not just Brahmin children, were "studying…in English" as an avenue out of crushing isolation and poverty.

3. *The Manu system will cease to function*

In that "time in the future", Phule said the traditional system "will…cease" to function. That "time in the future" would be when the Brahmins "will certainly reap the consequences of their deeds."[1] Therefore, Phule called on all—Brahmins included, and especially—to assist, not oppose, the Shudras and Atishudras, in gaining their equal rights.

4. *Shudra people will awaken and become wise and prosperous*

Some time in the future, Phule predicted the Shudra peoples

of India, people with a long history, will become wise and fortunate.

In Phule's day, Shudras were unwise: they did not know their history, and thus their "original status" as people of freedom, equality, and dignity. And in Phule's day, they were "unfortunate": the Shudras were largely "impoverished…very poor" and for "thousands of years Shudras and Atishudras were living under the dominion of Brahmins."[2]

But he prayed for a "time in the future" when that would change.

5. *The masses of India will join hands with truthseekers of all nations*

Phule predicted a last and singularly distinctive feature of that "time in the future" that would be an indicator of a new India: the masses of India will rise up and be truth-seekers with all who, around the world, were also truth-seekers.

Phule called others "those foreign" truth-seekers. And he named some of those truth-seekers from a nation far away. He called them the "followers of the Baliraja in the West."

Phule was a follower of Yashwant—the "one, great champion of the downtrodden, the holiest of the holy, the great sage and lover of Truth, Baliraja." And, Phule said, "Baliraja's followers came to this country, without the least

regard for what their own governments would say. They preached the true teachings of Yashwant among the Shudras and freed them from the deceit and slavery of the Brahmins."[3]

Those truth-seekers are persons from all nations. That is how we—Sunil and Thom—joined from East and West, in the same spirit—that of a truth seeker, a follower of Baliraja, a follower of Yashwant, as one who bends down before the Creator of us all.

At social and political rallies across India, we have spoken to tens of thousands, reminding them of Phule's vision. And our question has remained the same: Is this the day Phule prayed for, that day "some time in the future"? Discuss and listen to Phule: he will make you strong before men. Pray to and follow Yashwant: he will make you pure before the Creator.

PHULE ON BALIRAJA

A Conversation of Jotirao and Dhondiba

5

Phule on Baliraja

A Conversation of Jotirao and Dhondiba

One of the most incredible intellectual, social, and spiritual themes of Phule is his focus on the Kingdom of Baliraja—the sacrificed king. Like a kind of social and spiritual arecheologist, Phule spent extended time over the years to excavate the local connections and global truths of Baliraja from the ancient memories of the common people.

In the conversation between Jotirao and Dhondiba, Phule reviews the ancient memory and the social customs surrounding India's Baliraja, the sacrificed King. It is a story that echoes among many of the peoples about an ancient and model King—it is the story of a just and honourable ruler, a good and kind person, an unusual person whose death caused prayer to well up out of the hearts of the poor.

All of Phule's writings are fruitful. Some of his writings are thick and crowded, like a dense orchard. You can wander through the huge orchard of his thoughts for yourself. What

follows here, in Phule's own words, is the simple and contensed nectar of his argument.

Dhondiba:[1] *What was the extent of Bali's Kingdom?*

Jotirao: His Kingdom was extensive and was spread over a wide area. He divided the vast expanse of his kingdom into nine divisions, *khands*.

He used to observe the rules of warfare strictly such as not hitting retreating warriors on their backs: he always hit them on their front or faces. Hence, he came to be known as 'the front [the mouth]'. He was a friend of the down-trodden. He was fond of music also.

Baliraja had appointed high-ranking officers in the nine continents to look after revenue and justice in his vast Kingdom. There were many subordinate officers under them.

Whenever Baliraja wanted to entrust an important mission to some of his noblemen he used to hold full court Darbar. A bunch of betel leaves and a betel nut, along with yellow powder *bhandara* and a coconut, would be placed on a ceremonial circular tray. He would then tell his noblemen: "He who dares undertake this hazardous mission should come forward and take up the *vida*, the betel leaves and betel nut."

Hence, the Marathas had the practice of lifting up the *tali*, the holy tray containing the coconut, betel leaves and nut at the commencement of any holy or auspicious religious function. Their invocations ran as follows: "Har Har

Mahadeo! Glory be to Bhairoba! or Jotiba!" (literally 'May Bhairoba or Jotiba make us prosperous!')

Tali Sunday as a Holy Day Baliraja, along with his subjects, used to observe Sunday as a holy day, being sacred to the Divine God-head, Mahadeo [*Shankar*].

That is why the present day Marathisz—which includes the Maharas and the Mangs, the farmers [Kunbis] and gardeners [Malis]—worship Lord Shankar—their family deity—after due ablutions and holy offerings, even if it only be with simple dry bread. They do not take even a drop of water before performing the holy rite.

Dhondiba: *Having arrived at the outskirts of Baliraja's Kingdom along with his troops, what did Waman do?*

Jotirao: He made inroads into Baliraja's Kingdom along with his troops, persecuted his subjects in various ways and approached Baliraja's capital city. Baliraja, therefore, was forced to meet this challenge with his limited private army.

On the eighth day of the fortnight of Ashwin the shattering news of the defeat and death of King Baliraja reached.

Dhondiba: *We are told that Adi-narayan incarnated himself as Waman to banish Baliraja in the form of a pygmy beggar and hoodwinked Baliraja by asking him for the gift of only three steps on the earth.*

All this has been described by the Upadhyas in their fictitious books of Scriptures like the Bhagwat Gita. *So, are you saying that all this is rank fiction and bull-shit?*

Jotirao: Just reflect for a brief while, Dhondiba. If you carefully read the *Bhagwat Gita* for yourself, you will conclude that even the children's stories in the *Aesop's Fables* of the Europeans are far more credible than the *Bhagwat Gita* version of Baliraja by the Brahmins.

On the third day after the death of Baliraja, when the survivors of the army went home on the tenth night of Ashwin, their women-folk knew in their hearts that a second Baliraja was destined to appear on the scene and would surely usher in a heavenly reign of peace and prosperity on earth.

The Ancient Prayer Regarding the Coming of the Second Baliraja

Baliraja and Shudras The women stood in their doorways and greeted the man in the auspicious manner, waving a tray containing two lighted lamps round the men's faces for their prosperity, uttering these words: "May evil be banished from hence" and "May Bali's Kingdom Come!"

This practice has continued uninterrupted for centuries among the subjects of Baliraja.

The Kshyatriya women-folk of Bali's Kingdom wave the auspicious lamps about the heads of their husbands and sons on the tenth night of Ashwin [*Dashera*] and pray fervently to God for the advent of the second Baliraja's Kingdom: "May Bali's Kingdom come!"

This gives us an idea of the nobility of the second Baliraja. Blessed be that Baliraja and blessed be his subjects' loyalty.

Baliraja and Brahmins. Contrast against this the practice of the modern orthodox Brahmin Hindus.

As Waman was about to enter his personal residence, his wife had jokingly fashioned an image of Bali in wheat dough. Placing it on the threshold of the house, she said to Waman, "Look, dear Lord, your foe Bali has come here again to fight with you." Waman kicked the dough image of Bali contemptuously and entered his house.

This practice is followed by high caste ladies even to this day.

On the tenth day of Ashwin—known as *Dashera* or *Vijaya Dashami*—high caste ladies fashion a rice or wheat dough image of Bali and place their foot on the chest of Bali, piercing his stomach with a tender bough of the Shami tree. And then they enter their homes. This practice is found among many high caste families.

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"May evil be banished!

May the Kingdom of Baliraja come!"

For centuries, these plaintive words have cried out from the hearts of the women of India. Women, that is, of the Shudra castes. Some may crush the King. But the poor call the King.

What must haunt everyone who follows Phule's explanation is the question: *who is this Second Baliraja?*

Who is this One to come—this King of lost-justice, of the down-trodden, and of music? Who is the Baliraja—the sacrificed King—of whom Phule speaks?

Who is this One in whose presence evil will be banished? And when will the prayers of the women of India be fulfilled? When will the Second Baliraja come?

But then, that is another story, for a later chapter.

PHULE ON BALIRAJA AND MANU

Mentors of Civilizations

6

Phule on Baliraja and Manu

Mentors of Civilizations

The 1800s were the times of the British—the conquering, Christian, capitalist British. Phule knew them. He knew them well, without illusions.

As an adult of the mid-1800s, Phule was a contemporary of Marx. But he thought differently than Marx. Phule was an independent Indian thinker under the British heel. Marx was an immigrant researcher in the British Library. Marx imagined the poor. Phule was the poor.

Before worldviews were being discussed, Phule already had drawn rich and integrated worldview conclusions. He saw beyond the political. He saw deeper than the economic. Actually, Phule saw into the spiritual.

Phule understood clearly that is was the philosophical and religious roots of the Brahminical worldview that undergirded the persistent and pathetic plight of the India he experienced. What Max Weber, Gunnar Myrdal, and Lawrence Harrison would later see in the 20th century,

Jotirao Phule already saw in the 19th century.[1] And once Phule grasped that worldview insight, he was a bulldog.

In the fight for the freedom of India, Phule clamped down on the worldview issue and never—never—let go. He was jerked. He was beaten. And he was abused. But he never let go—much to the anguish, to the anger, and even to the shamed embarrassment of his enemies. The fangs of his clean thinking had sunken deep into the leg of lies. And he never let go.

As we have already said, Phule was a solitary intellectual-Mount-Kailash: from a high peak of keen perception, he grasped that the difference between British civilisation and Brahmin civilisation was the difference between their spiritual mentors. England was Baliraja-mentored. India was Manu-mentored.

The British were mentored historically by Baliraja. The Brahmins had mentored India historically by Manu. From that firm insight, Phule never budged. He never let go. That was his point. And that was his power.

To Phule, only something more pure could overcome something so impure. That is why Phule was so fascinated by the ancient Kingdom of Baliraja in India. And that is why he was so strongly attracted to the followers of Baliraja in the West—those truthseekers from afar.

To Phule it was, at root, the instructions of Baliraja that had produced the political, economic, and social progress those other nations enjoyed in their history.

And it was, at root, the oppressive spiritual speculations of Brahmins that had restrained his own nation from ever enjoying political participation, economic prosperity, or social equality. Instead, they had written for India a long and painful history of political oppression, economic poverty, and social inequality.

Thomas Paine urged political revolution. Karl Marx preached economic revolution. Only Jotirao Phule stood for spiritual revolution.

What follows, in his own words, is one of Phule's discussions about the colonial rule of England in India, and of the worldview differences that separated the British from the Brahmins.

Dhondiba: *What was your intention then, in your younger years, in taking lessons in dand patta—a kind of martial arts in sword-fighting and fencing and shooting?*

Jotirao: The better to destroy our benevolent British Government!

Dhondiba: *Where did you pick up such poisonous ideas?*

Jotirao: I picked them up from some "enlightened" Brahmin scholars.

Our society was splintered in diverse caste distinction. We were disunited. And therefore the British became our rulers.

In order to destroy the patriotic urge and feelings of the ignorant and superstitious masses in our land, Brahmins are trying to canvass support for their cunning religion.

They further preach their doctrine that unless the people belonging to different castes and social strata in India are united, we will never be in a position to drive the British rulers out of India: that unless we change and modify our ancient and revealed religion and stand united as one, we will never be able to compete with the Americans, the French and the Russians.

These enlightened people have proved this favourite thesis of theirs on the authority of quotations from the works of celebrated authors like Thomas Paine and others. Being misled by the motivated propaganda of these "enlightenment" Brahmin scholars, I myself acted in a misguided way in my boyhood.

But when I reflected long and deeply over the teachings contained in the above mentioned books, the true meaning of the motivated propaganda of these "enlightened" Brahmin scholars dawned on me.

Actually, if all the Shudras were to regard themselves as the co-disciples of the second Baliraja—Jesus Christ—we would, then, be constrained to condemn the spurious books and scriptures of the ancestors of the Brahmins:

- their arrogant arrogation of superiority to themselves over Shudras would be exposed
- their idle priestly class will not be able to fatten itself at the cost of the Shudras
- then, even the all-powerful Brahma or even his sire will not dare claim the superiority of the Brahmins over the Shudras.

The original ancestors of those people, the Aryans, did not know even the meaning of the word "patriotism". So it is not surprising if they have interpreted the word "patriotism" in such an odd way.

Even before the advent of Baliraja—that is, Jesus Christ—the English people took lessons in patriotism from the Greeks.

After their conversion to Christianity—the religion of Baliraja—they imbibed this virtue of patriotism to such an extent, and perfected it so much, that no other nation could equal or excel them on the score of patriotism.

Perhaps one may bracket them with George Washington, the follower of Baliraja [Jesus] in America and Lafayette, the follower of Baliraja [Jesus] in France. That would be a logical comparison.

If the original ancestors of these enlightened Brahmin scholars were truly patriotic, then they would never have inscribed articles or enactments in their religious books condemning their own fellow humans and countrymen as worse than beasts.

How strange it is that these Brahmins consider themselves as pure, elevated, and ennobled when they eat the droppings and drink the urine of beasts—holy cows—that consume human shit. And yet, at the same time, these same Brahmins refuse to drink the water of a fountain from the hands of a Shudra.

The same original ancestors of these "enlightened" Brahmin scholars posed a type of unholy patriotism against the Greeks' patriotism.

Through whose good offices did we come to know the true difference? It was through the English people.

So who will heed the advice of such scholars to drive away the British from our land? Aren't the British the same philanthropically-minded English who have just recently emancipated us from the centuries-long slavery of the Brahmin?

He must indeed be an ungrateful fool who would raise his hand against his own liberator or benefactor.

I tell you, Dhondiba: the British are but brief and transitory visitors to this ancient land of ours. They are here today and gone tomorrow!

Therefore, true wisdom dictates that all of us Shudras should try, with the utmost haste, to emancipate ourselves from the hereditary thraldom imposed upon us by the Brahmins. And we should do it during this window of opportunity of British regime rule in our country.

It was through Providential dispensation that the Revolt engineered by the Brahmin Nana and his henchmen was put down by the brave English rulers.

Otherwise the so-called "emancipated" Brahmin would surely have sentenced many Mahars for wearing the dhoti tucked away on one side.

Or that same "emancipated" Brahmin would have sentenced some other Shudra to "transportation" for life—all for the "offence" of having uttered Sanskrit verses during religious discourses.

PHULE'S GURU

The Mentor of TruthSeekers

7

Phule's Guru

The Mentor of TruthSeekers

Real Phule was radical Phule. Too many have not understood that.

Reformer Hindus of the 19th and early 20th centuries stressed the need for structural change *in* Indian society—*adjustment* of the system. They called for Manu-reformation. Radical Phule stood for nothing less than foundational change *of* Indian society—*annihilation* of the system. He called for Manu-rejection.

The starting points for the reformers were *inside* the brahmanical system: *Brahmo*, *Prarthna*, *Arya*.

Ram Mohan Roy started *Brahmo* Samaj, condemning the barriers of caste divisions, idol worship, human and animal sacrifices, advocating the universal brotherhood of humanity.

Justice Ranade launched *Prarthna* Samaj. Ranade was a devotee of social reforms such as inter-dining, inter-caste marriage, and remarriage of widows.

Swami Dayanand Saraswathi would later found *Arya* Samaj, repudiating caste restrictions. Arya Samaj concentrated on protesting the prohibition of sea-voyages outside pure India, even insisting on the new idea that Shudras should be allowed be educated, and even more, to learn the Vedas.

Roy, Ranade and Saraswathi looked around their India and saw the need for *adaptation*. That would be sufficient, they said: Manu-adaptation. Adaptation would be enough. They looked for adjustment *within* the system.

The starting point for Phule, however, was *outside* the brahmanical system: *Truth*. That is why Phule founded *Satyashodhak* Samaj— the Society of *Truthseekers*.

Truth. By *truth* Phule critiqued. By *truth* Phule took courage. And by *truth* Phule called out to every truth *seeker*.

The Samaj twins of the 1800s, Brahmo and Prarthna, had no popular appeal. They had activities and debates for the intelligentsia. In contrast, the Satyashodhak spokesman had universal appeal. He acted and demonstrated out of truth-seeking integrity.

Phule believed truth could be seen, stepped, and shared. He was convinced that truth can always be seen with eyes of honesty.

He also believed that if you could see truth you should step into truth—if you discern what is right, then you should do what is right. If you become aware of truth, you should also act on truth.

And, Phule was firm: whatever you see, and do, you should

also share, so others can also see through lies, change their minds and correct their ways, and join with you in seeking the truth.

To Phule, when you discern the truth, you should do the truth. And as you do the truth, you should declare that truth. Such was the new Samaj, the new community—those who joined together around truth—to discern it, to do it, and to disperse it.

And such was Phule. Pure Phule. Radical Phule.

- *See* the truth
- *Step in line* with the truth
- *Share* the truth

Strong convictions, simple conduct, sure courage. That is why his enemies hated him. But, then again, that is also why India honours him.

Phule was the inspiration of others. For example : *almost all* Westerners know about Gandhi, the father of the nation of India. *Some* know about Ambedkar, the father of the Constitution of India. But *nobody* knows about Phule.

And yet, both Ghandi and Ambedkar said Phule was their Mahatma— their Guru, their supreme teacher. Think about that. Take a moment and contemplate that.

What is the significance of the fact that both Ambedkar and Gandhi touched the feet of Phule? Who was this Jotirao? Who was this man Phule? Who was the man from Maharashtra of the 1800s who lived among peasants and

agitated for their economic betterment?

It was Phule, not Gandhi, who was first described as the man with the half-naked body and the staff in his hand. And it was Phule, in the 1800s, whose stationery letterhead gave India the cry *'Satyam Eva Jayate'—'Truth Alone Triumphs'.*

Today, the quotation *'Satyam Eva Jayate'—'Truth Alone Triumphs',* is identified with Gandhi. But where did Gandhi get it? Gandhi got it from his Guru, Mahatma Jotirao Phule. It is Phule, not Gandhi, who has given India the anchor: *'Satyam Eva Jayate'—'Truth Alone Triumphs'.*

And deeper still, who was the Mahatma of Phule? Who was Phule's Guru? And what was that Guru's core truth?

If you know Phule's Guru, you know his inspiration. If you know Phule's Guru, you can understand his radical actions. But that is the point. While most admire Phule, they have no clue whom Phule admired.

Millions admit Phule acted according to his convictions, taking action with intelligence, with integrity, and with insistence. But not one-in-a-million can tell you who Phule himself admired, whom he advocated, whom he even adored—and whom he imitated.

We could not. There was a time when we could not have told you who Phule found worthy to follow. We could not have explained Phule's vision for India—a new India.

I, Sunil, learned Phule's secret while reading *Slavery* in jail. And I, Thom, first learned of Phule from Sunil.

So we ask. Can you? Do you know the Mahatma of Phule? Do you know the identity of Baliraja? Do you know whom Phule meant when he spoke of Yashwant? Do you know why the prayers of the village women were Phule's prayer: "Let our sorrows melt away! Let the Kingdom of Baliraja come!"

Do you know the One who was the secret—the life-long inspiration—of Mahatma Jotirao Phule? Do you know where Phule found, saw, and was sustained by Truth?

Here is Phule's answer: truth that is outside the system, truth that can critique the system, truth that can transform the system.

Phule lived and died within the Hindu community. But Phule did not believe the brahmanical system. And the reason is because he had found Truth. It was the *jotirao* in his heart—the *flame* in his heart.

It is Truth that made Jotirao the first Hindu ever in the history of India to step out and open a school for the girl child.

It is Truth that made Phule the first caste-Hindu in the 3,000 year civilisation to stand up and give a cup of well-water, sit down at the same meal and share hand-to-hand the same food with those people the Brahmin-sanctioned system said were only talking animals—his Mahar and Mang untouchable neighbours.

It was Truth that stirred his anger—3anger against a system built on what he jarringly called lies and superstitions. And

it was Truth that caused his anger to act against religiously-sanctioned exploitation.

It was Truth that broke his heart. Everyone admitted that Phule cried tears for the poor.

But it was also Truth that dried his tears: dried his tears and lifted his head to stand up, to speak out, and to do justice.

Professor Deshpande of Jawaharlal Nehru University, is right. Only Marx and Phule saw clearly that for India to truly change, the system must be changed. For Phule, it is not about Manu-adjustment. It was about Manu-annihilation.

But Deshpande is also right when he observes: while Marx called for the jailing of his enemies, Phule called for his enemies to join him, so they could take part in the new India. But why? Why such a radical Phule?

Who would answer the centuries of prayers of the women of India? Who would be the mentor in Truth for creating the new India?

Phule often used the interview to communicate his thoughts. We will do the same.

Here are Phule's answers to the Interviewer, drawn from his writings.

Our three basic questions are:

1. How did you discover Truth?
2. Who is your compass for Truth?

3. How can we join you in following Truth?

Question 1

Interviewer: *Mahatma Phule, how did you discover Truth? Did all this emphasis of yours on being a TruthSeeker only evolve over a long period of time? Or was there some point in time, an experience where you would say you discovered Truth?*

Phule: The ancestors of the Brahmins waged a war against the original inhabitants in this land long ago and after defeating them, turned them into their slaves. Later on, intoxicated with their power, they exploited every opportunity to produce crafty and cunning books and built, as it were, a strong fortress of these books in which they imprisoned all the slaves for generations.

There, they have been torturing them in various ways and enjoying themselves at the cost of the slaves.

When the British established their rule in this land, the kindhearted Europeans and Americans were deeply aggrieved by our misery. So they entered our prisons and asked us,

"People, you are human beings just like us.

"Our Creator and Sustainer are one and the same. You are entitled to have all the rights that we have.

"So why do you obey the dictates of these crafty Brahmins?"

All these sacred ideas awakened me to my real rights.

Then I kicked the crafty Brahman prison gates open and fervently thanked the Creator for this deliverance.

I solemnly pledge: I denounce all the main books of the Brahmins that decree us their slaves—as well as any other books that claim so—and embrace that book (which may have been written by a person belonging to any other country or religion) that propounds that all human beings have a right to enjoy human rights in equal measure.

I will deem myself to be the younger brother of the authors of that book since we have all been created by the same Creator and will behave accordingly.

Secondly, there are some people who mercilessly treat other fellow human beings as mean and inferior on the basis of the authority derived from their arrogant religious beliefs. I will not blacken the name of our Creator by allowing them this license because it would go against the holy rule of equal rights decreed by Him.

Thirdly, I will regard all those Shudras who, I am convinced, follow the true path of righteousness, who believe only in God, their Creator, and who have vowed to behave in a clean and straight manner.

As my brothers, I will treat them as members of my family and will eat food with them without any inhibitions whatsoever.

I appeal to my illiterate, suffering Shudra brethren, that if any one of them desires to free himself from the slavery of the Brahmins, he should communicate his name to me in a letter. This will immensely strengthen my resolve and I will be extremely grateful to him.

Question 2

Interviewer: *Everyone knows that a compass allows the pilgrim to determine his/her direction reliably, quickly, and accurately—at any time, under any conditions. We know a compass allows the navigator to cross uncharted areas.*

You, Jotirao, are certainly a person who has crossed uncharted waters. And you certainly did not use the Manu system of Brahmanism for your inner compass.

We know you taught Savitribai, your wif]e, to read. Even Ambedkar and Ghandi never did that. And you are the first Indian in the history of India to open a school for the girl child.

You are the first in India's entire history as a civilization to open your drinking well as family to those of any and all castes and outcastes for a cup of water.

And you are the first in India's history to invite all castes and even outcastes to sit and take food together—as equals, as family.

So tell us, Mahatma Phule, who is your inspiration? Where did you get such radical ideas? How did you gather such incredible courage? In a word, who is your compass for Truth?

Phule: His name is Yashwant. And his great teaching is: 'You must love your enemy and do him a good turn.'

Our Creator is omniscient and merciful. In the past, one great champion of the downtrodden, the holiest of the holy,

the great sage and lover of Truth, Baliraja, came into this world.

He realized that the great Almighty God, our great Father and Creator, had given us the true and holy knowledge and had openly granted everyone an equal right to it. He fathomed the Divine Will—that this knowledge be shared by all alike.

Therefore, he undertook the task of releasing his poor oppressed brethren from the bondage of slavery by wicked, cunning and treacherous hunters like the Brahmins and he strove to establish the kingdom of God on earth. Thus the prophecy of our ancient women, that one day Bali's kingdom will be established on earth once again was realized, at least to some extent.

Millions became followers of this Baliraja in Europe. In Europe he had brought about a tremendous upheaval. All of them began to work ceaselessly for this noble task of establishing God's Kingdom on earth.

Followers of Baliraja in the West, that is Jesus Christ, came to this country—without the least regard for what their governments would say.

They preached the true teaching of Jesus among the Shudras and freed them from the deceit and slavery of the Brahmins. They pulled the rope of slavery from around their necks—tied there by the Brahmins—and threw it in the oppressors' face.

Yashwant: he is the one great champion of the

downtrodden. The prophecy of our ancient women realized—that one day Baliraja's kingdom will be established on earth once again. The holiest of the holy. The great sage. The lover of Truth: Baliraja.

If all males in the world were to follow the path of Truth, if they did not deprive the women in the world of their inalienable human rights, don't you think the kingdom of God would be inaugurated in this world? Wouldn't all humanity be truly happy and contented?

I shall quote one saying of Baliraja here. It will carry conviction to your heart with finality. It is: *Do to others as you would have others do to you.*

Question 3

Interviewer: *Thank you, Jotiji. One last question.*

Now, if we would like to see this vision—your vision—become the vision of India, how can we join you in following the Truth? How can we also become TruthSeekers?

Phule: I have written *Sarvajanik Satyadharma Pustak* to show men and women what kind of conduct to adopt towards others, with the Creator's thoughts always in their minds and which will please Him. I ask of Him that this book be accepted by all and that all of us enjoy equally our Creator's kingdom of truth. In summary:

1. God is one and all human beings are his children: that is why they are my brothers and sisters.

- *I will treat them as brothers and sisters.*
- *I will respect women.*
- *I will give attention to educate my children in truth.*

2. *In worshipping God and religious duties, I will not use any Brahmanical middleman, and I will tell others about this. In everyday living, I will abide in lawful submission to the government, and I will encourage others to do the same.*
3. *I will follow Baliraja and I will work to build his Kingdom of Truth in love, with dignity and equality, for the freedom of all.*
4. *I will abide in truth, I will stand for truth, and I will tell the truth in love. Truth is the primary home of all. Truth is the shelter of happiness. I will not give in to untruth.*
5. *God, Who is the embodiment of Truth, is my witness: may He give me strength to abide by these things and may He give me help to live my life this way.*

✳✳✳✳

The interview is concluded. The involvement now commences.

Jotirao Phule: 'the Flaming Flower'—that's the meaning of his name. Surely his simple mother and earnest father could never have dreamed that their little baby would be such fire in the soul of India.

He wept tears for the little girls of India. He stood solid for the common villager person of India. He set aflame the Manu priestcraft prison of India. He was a flame, and he was a flower—a beautiful fragrance, a burning fire. Truth beyond this world gave Phule the power to speak truth into his world, in love.

In the 19th century, his voice was felicitated, feared, and fought against. The nation's leaders felicitated him, the religiously threaded Brahmins feared him, and the system's privileged fought against him.

In the 20th century, his voice was followed, fumbled, and forgotten. Phule's light was first followed by Ambedkar, later fumbled by Gandhi, and eventually forgotten by the very people he loved, lived and spoke for.

Now in the 21st century, his voice must be found, followed, and flourish again. For India to find the voice of Phule will be to confront the ground realities of India. For India to follow the voice of Phule will be to begin correcting the crushing centuries of India. For India to flourish the voice of Phule will be to blossom into our Creator's intention for India.

When India listens again to her own Father of social revolution, she will at last gain the right to be honoured as the Mother of global revolution.

Perhaps the kind hand of Providence that Phule spoke of was saving Phule for the 21st century. Perhaps now is the time Phule prayed for. Perhaps this is that time—"some time in the future"—that Phule longed for.

At least we know this. We know that the goal of all TruthSeekers is to see the Baliraja Proposal of Mahatma Phule become the daily experience of India.

And we know that the goal of all TruthSeekers is for India to flourish by the mentorship of Baliraja, the one whose nectar truth is to actually do to others what you wish they would do to you. Do it with dignity. Do it with equality. Do it in love. Do it for freedom.

Do that in the streets of our village. Do that in the chambers of the Lok Saba. Do that in our heart of hearts. Do *that*, and India will flourish.

We have not finished the journey. But we have begun the journey.

The steps to that goal are

1. *to absorb truth,* personally walking humbly and educating myself.
2. *to activate truth,* relationally showing mercy and imitating Baliraja.
3. *to agitate truth,* socially doing justice and anticipating the kingdom.

for the total transformation of India, so India can finally, freely, and fully flourish.

Actually, we cannot say it better than Phule, in his own words: '*Satyam Eva Jayate*'—'*Truth Alone Triumphs.*'

Endnotes

Chapter 1
The World's Worst Slavery

* Dhananjay Keer

Dhananjay Keer (1913-1984), an eminent biographer, received the Government of India *Padma Bhushan* award in recognition of his writings.

Dr. Keer's (Shivaji University) biographies are distinguished both by painstaking research and a writing style that approaches a form of art. While working with the Education Committee of Bombay Municipal Corporation, Keer wrote pen pictures for the *Free Hindustan.*

His major works include the biographies of Veer Savarkar, Dr. Ambedkar, and Lokamanya Tilak as well as those of Mahatma Phule, Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj and Mahatma Gandhi.

Chapter 2
Phule's Fire

1 *Slavery. Collected Works of Mahatma Jotirao Phule* 1991 [1873], 72-3.

2 Tenets of the *Satya-Samaj' Slavery* 1991, 86.

3 *Slavery* 1991, 73.

4 *Slavery* 1991, 73.

5 *Slavery* 1991, 73.

6 *Selected Writings of Jotirao Phule* 2002, 98.

Chapter 3
Phule on the History of India

[1] See Jotirao Phule, *Selected Writings of Jotirao Phule* (G. P. Deshpande, editor). New Delhi: LeftWord 2002, 71-73.

[2] See Phule, *Slavery* in *Selected Writings* 2002, 97-99; and *Sarvajanik Satya Dharma Pustak/The Book of the Truth* in *Selected Writings* 2002, 235-236.

[3] Phule, *Slavery* in *Selected Writings* 2002, 29, 98, and 31; and *Satsar* in *Selected Writings* 2002, 205 and 210-211.

[4] Phule, *Slavery* in *Selected Writings* 2002, 98, 31-33.

[5] "Muslims" in this section is our substitution, translated "Mussalmans" by Maya Pandit (1873). See Jotirao Phule, 'Caste Discrimination' *The Book of Truth,* 1873, in Deshpande 2002, 235.

[6] *Atiranati*, which means *extreme primitives.*

[7] Deshpande, Professor of Chinese Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, says: "Phule has turned *Yeshu* ["Jesus"] into *Yashwant*, a Marathi name which means *the Successful One.*"

[8] Phule, *Sarvajanik Satya Dharma Pustak/The Book of the Truth* in *Selected Writings* 2002, 235-236; and *Slavery* in *Selected Writings* 2002, 75-76.

[9] Phule, *The Book of Truth* in *Selected Writings* 2002, 236; and *Slavery* in *Selected Writings* 2002, 93, and 98-9.

[10] On the Creator and providential history, see the views of George Washington, whom Phule referenced often, in Michael Novak and Jana Novak, *Washington's God: Religion, Liberty, and the Father of Our Country*. New York: Basic

Books 2006, 95-142 and 175-195.

See also Gordon Graham, *The Shape of the Past: A Philosophical Approach to History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1997, 1-43, 166-200.

[11] Karl Marx, cited in Deshpande 2002, 18.

Chapter 4
Phule's Prayer

[1] *Cultivator's Whipcord* 1883, 129.

[2] *Cultivator's Whipcord* 1883, 127.

[3] *Slavery* 1873, Part 10.

Chapter 5
Phule on Baliraja

[1] *Dhondiba* as the interviewer represents Namdev Khumbar, and *Jotirao* is Jotirao Phule.Here we have given only his conclusions.

For Phule's extensive and full answer, see Jotirao Govinda Phule, *Slavery*. Edited by K. Jamanadas, translated by P. G. Patil. Bombay: Education Department, Govt. of Maharashtra Mantralaya,1991. Cf. http:// www.dalitstan.org/books/slavery/slavry6.html.

Chapter 6
Phule on Baliraja and Manu

[1] See Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. New York: Scribner 1950; Gunnar Myrdal,

Asian Drama. London: Allen Lane Penguin 1971; and Lawrence E. Harrison and Samuel P. Huntington (editors), *Culture Matters: How Values Shape Human Progress.* New York: Basic Books 2000.

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Phule in Others' Words

"In a genuine sense, Mahatma Jotirao Phule should be rightly considered the first social revolutionary, not just in the state of Maharashtra, as is widely thought, but in the country at large. In fact, the message of his revolutionary work encompasses the spirit of universal brotherhood, transcending the barriers of caste, race, gender and religions."

—*Bhalchandra Mungékar*, Ph.D.
Member, The Planning Commission, Govt. of India, and former Vice-Chancellor, Mumbai University

"Mahatma Jotirao Phule is a rare personality in the history of Indian society. Although he was born in India, he belongs to the entire world. His ideas are relevant in the establishment of a society where equality, liberty, and universal brotherhood prevail. And in the century to come, Phule's voice will be heard around the world."

—*Jag Mohan Singh Verma*, Ph.D.
Professor and Head, Department of Sociology, University of Lucknow

"For outsiders, the caste system is often perceived as abolished over 50 years ago when India declared independence from Britain. Westerners tend to think caste is a thing of the past. It isn't. The caste system is still very much in place. If you want to understand India, understand the Indian caste system. If you want to understand and overcome the caste system, come stand with Phule."

Vice Chancellor, Pune University, and Chief Economist, Reserve Bank of India.

"In 1848—the same year of the *Communist Manifesto* in the West—Phule, at the age of 21, dared to establish a school for a untouchable women, the most oppressed and desolate segment of Indian society—defying high caste backlash. Then, his arguments were unmatched . Today, his voice is unavoidable."

—*Braj Ranjan Mani*
Author of *Debrahamanising History*, formerly with *The Times of I*

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